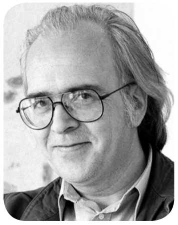
A Stiff Shot of Successo



Ashlar-Vellum Xenon™ CAD and 3D modeling software allowed designer John Bicht of VersaLab to expand his high-end home espresso grinder into a much sought-after professional espresso machine with the design of two important accessories for the commercial coffee market.

Busy running his business, John didn't have much time to work on new design projects, but he had some great ideas for solving several problems inherent in the Barista's job. After being away from the software for a significant length of time, John fired up Xenon and within minutes was productive again.

He particularly enjoys the combination of easy conceptual sketching with the underlying precision modeling. "You can create something which you know is accurate and you can generate virtual sketches with this product and also hang your hat on it since you know it's the right size and it's going to work, even if you haven't put a huge amount of hours into early work.

"It amazes me that I can sit down with a CAD program that I haven't used for five months, because I've been doing other aspects of the business, and within minutes be comfortable again and start doing stuff."

One idea was for a dosing hopper which, unlike conventional grinders, delivers a single dose of beans to the grinder each time, preserving freshness. Pull the handle on the hopper and a premeasured dose of beans goes down the chute and is ground in the portafilter.

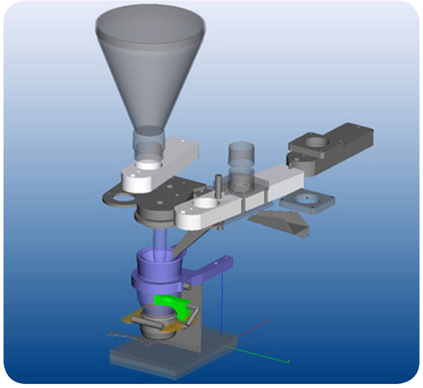
John's further idea was a holder for the portafilter. The holder frees the barista's hands allowing him or her to prepare another shot while the first is grinding. When using two machines along with their Versalab Espresso Press a single barista can easily prepare two drinks every 70 seconds, even when each drink requires 30 seconds to pour.

Xenon's incredible power to easily create any 3D shape with precision allowed John to think through his design, coming up with accessories that were pleasing to the eye of the customer and the touch of the barista. As he tells it:

"It's all right there in front of the customer, so it counts a lot what it looks like and what it feels like. So I was able to go, 'Let's make the handle a little longer. Let's make it a little bigger around. That's right. That'll feel better.'"

By developing these two new accessories Versalab was quickly able to move from a strictly high-end home machine into the commercial market, turning their business around and allowing them to not only survive but to thrive in a down economy.







The dosing hopper (top) and the portafilter holder (bottom) are two accessories designed by John for his original espresso grinder, also designed in Xenon (center) CAD and 3D modeling software.

Background/Contact

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